

The Essence of Religion and its Purpose

In this article I would like to resolve three issues:

- A) What is the essence of religion?
- B) Whether its essence is attained in this world, or to the next?
- C) Whether its purpose is to benefit the Creator, or the creatures?

At first glance the reader may not understand the three issues that I set before me in this essay. For whom is it who does not know what religion is? Not to mention its rewards and punishments, that are destined to come mainly in the afterlife. Not to mention the third issue, for everyone knows that it is to benefit the creatures and to guide them to delight and happiness, and what else need we add?

Indeed I have nothing more to add. But because they are so familiar with the three concepts from infancy, they need not add and further examine them for the rest of their lives. And that shows of their lack of knowledge in these exalted matters, which are necessarily the very foundation upon which the whole structure of religion is based.

Therefore you tell me, how is it possible, that a child of twelve or thirteen years of age, can already thoroughly grasp these subtle notions, and so sufficiently, that he will need to add any further concepts and knowledge in these matters for the rest of his life?

Indeed, here lies the problem! For this rash assumption brought with it all the recklessness and wild conclusions that have come into our world in our generation! And it brought us to a state where the second generation has almost completely slipped from under our hands.

The Absolute Good

To avoid tiring the readers with long discussions, I have relied on all that I wrote in previous essays, especially on the essay “The Giving of the Torah”, which are all like a preface to the exalted topic ahead. Here I shall speak briefly and simply, to make it understood for all.

And first we must understand the Creator, who is the Absolute Goodness. Meaning that there is no way in the world that He will ever cause any sorrow to any person. And this we take to be the first concept, for our common sense clearly shows that the basis for any evil doing in the world stems only from the Will to Receive.

That means that his eagerness to benefit himself makes him harm his fellow man, due to his Will to Receive self gratification. Thus, if no being would find contentment in itself, no being would ever harm another. And if we sometimes find some being that harms another, without any Will to Receive self gratification, it does that only because of an old habit, that originated in the will to receive, which now rids it of the need to find a new reason.

And because we realize that the Creator is in and of Himself complete and needs no one to help Him to completion, since He precedes everything else, it is therefore clear that He does not have any Will to Receive. And because He has no Will to Receive, a reason for Him to harm anyone is fundamentally absent; it is as simple as that.

Furthermore, it is completely agreeable to our mind as the first concept, that He possesses a will to Bestow goodness to others, meaning to His creatures. And that is evidently shown by the great creation that He has created and set before our eyes. For in this world there are beings that necessarily feel either good or bad, and that feeling necessarily comes from the Creator. And once it is absolutely clear that there is no aim to harm in the nature of the Creator, it necessitates that the creatures receive only goodness from Him, for He has created them only to bestow upon them.

Thus we learn that He has but a Will to Bestow goodness, and in no way can it be that there might be any harmfulness in His domain. Hence we have defined Him as the absolute goodness. And after we have learned that, let us take a look at the reality that is guided by Him, and how He bestows only goodness upon them.

His Guidance is Particular Guidance

By observing the systems of nature we understand that any being of the four types – still, vegetative, animate and speaking, both as a whole and in particular, are found to be under particular guidance, meaning a slow and gradual growth by way of cause and effect, as the fruit up on the tree, which is guided with favourable guidance to finally become a sweet and fine-looking fruit.

Go and ask a botanist, how many phases the fruit undergoes from the time it becomes visible until it is completely ripe. Not only do its preceding phases show no evidence of its sweet and fine-looking end, but as if to vex, they show the opposite of the final outcome.

The sweeter the fruit at its end, the more bitter it is in the earlier phases of its development. And so it is with the animate and speaking types: for the beast whose mind is little at its end, is not so wanting while it grows. Whereas man, whose mind is great at his end, is very wanting while he develops. “A day old calf is called an ox”, that is to say it has the strength to stand on its own four legs and walk, and has the intelligence to avoid hazards on its path.

But a day old infant lies seemingly senseless. And should one who is not accustomed to the conducts of this world examine these two newborns, he would certainly conclude that the human infant will amount to nothing and the calf would turnout to be a great hero, that is if he were to judge by the wisdom of the calf compared with the wisdom of the senseless and mindless child.

Thus it is evident that His guidance over the reality that He has created is in the form of Particular Guidance, without taking into account the order of the phases of development, for they deceive us and prevent us from understanding their purpose, being always in an opposite position to their final shape.

It is about such matters that we say - “no man is wiser than he who is experienced”. Because only he who is experienced has the opportunity to examine the creation in all its phases of development, all the way through completion, and he can calm things down and not fear those spoilt images that the creation undergoes in the phases of its development, but only to believe in its fine and unique outcome.

Thus we have thoroughly shown the conducts of His providence in our world, which is only a purposeful care. That the attribute of goodness is not apparent before the coming of the creature to completeness, to its final ripeness. On the contrary, it rather always takes a form of corruption in the eyes of the beholders. Thus you see that God bestows upon His creatures only goodness, but that goodness comes by way of purposeful care.

Two Paths: A Path of Pain and A Path of Torah

We have shown that God is absolute goodness, and that He watches us in complete benevolence without a shred of evil in a particular guidance. That means that His guidance compels us to go through a series of phases that go by cause and effect, meaning preceding and resulting, until we are qualified to accept the desired goodness. And then we shall live out our purpose, as the ripe and fine-looking fruit. And we also gather that that purpose is assured for us all, or else you flaw His providence, by saying it is insufficient for its purpose.

Our sages said: “Divinity in the lower ones, a high need.” That means that since His guidance is purposeful and aims to eventually bring us to adhesion, to reside within us, that is regarded a high need. Meaning that if we do not come to that we shall find ourselves regarding His providence flawed.

It is much like a great king, who had a son at old age, and he was very fond of him. Therefore, since the day he was born he thought of only good things for him. He collected the finest most precious books of the wisest and finest men in the kingdom, and prepared for him a school. He sent after the finest builders and built palaces of pleasure. He gathered all the musicians and prepared for him music halls, and called the finest bakers and chefs to provide him with all the delicacies of the world.

And the son grew older. But alas, he is a fool and has no desire for education, and he is blind and cannot see and take to his heart the beauty of the buildings. And he is deaf and cannot hear the poems and the music. Alas, he is ill and is allowed to feed solely on coarse flour bread, and it is all so infuriating.

However, such a thing may happen to a flesh and blood king, but that is impossible to say about God almighty, where there cannot be any deceit. Therefore He has prepared for us two paths of development:

The first is a Path of Pain, which is the conduct of development of creation from within itself, which is, by nature, compelled to take, by way of cause and effect, in varying situations that slowly develop us, until we come to a resolution to choose the good over the bad and to be qualified for the purpose as He desires.

And that path is indeed a long and painful one. Therefore He has prepared for us a pleasant and gentle way, which is the Path of Torah and Mitzvot, which can qualify us for our purpose painlessly and in a short time.

It turns out that our final aim is to be qualified for adhesion with Him, for Him to reside within us. That aim is a certainty and there is no way to deviate from it, because His guidance supervises us in both paths, which are the Path of Pain and the Path of Torah. But looking at reality, we find that His guidance comes simultaneously in both paths, which our sages refer to as a Way of the Earth and a Way of Torah.

The Essence of Religion is to Develop in us the Sense of the Recognition of Evil

Our sages say: “Should the Lord mind whether one slays at the throat or he slays at the back of his neck? After all, the mitzvot were given for the sole purpose of purifying the people”. That purification has been thoroughly clarified in the article the Giving of the Torah, but here I would like to clear out the essence of that development, which is attained through Torah and mitzvot.

Bear in mind, that it is the recognition of the evil within us. That the mitzvot can purify those who delve in them slowly and gradually. And the scale by which we

measure the degrees of purification is the measurement of our recognition of the evil within us.

In every being there is a natural willingness to reject any evil from within him. But the difference between one person and the next is only in the recognition of evil. That a more developed person notices about himself a greater amount of evil, and hence rejects and separates the evil from within him to a greater extent, while the undeveloped senses in himself only a small amount of evil, and will therefore reject only a small amount of evil. As a result, he leaves all his filth within him, for he doesn't recognize it as filth.

And so as not to tire the reader, we shall clarify the general meaning of good and bad. Evil, in general, is nothing more than self love, called egoism, since it is opposite in form to the Creator, who hasn't any will to receive for Himself, but only to bestow.

As we've said in the Giving of the Torah, that pleasure and sublimity are measured by the extent of equality of form with his Maker. And the pain and intolerance are measured by the extent of change of form from his Maker. Thus, egoism is loathsome and pains us, as it is opposite in form to the Maker.

But that loathsomeness is not divided equally among all souls, but is given in varying measures. For the savage, undeveloped person does not regard egoism as a bad attribute, and he thus uses it openly without shame or restraints. He steals and murders in broad daylight wherever he finds it possible. The somewhat more developed person senses some measure of his egoism to be evil, and he is at least ashamed to use it in public, to steal and kill openly. But in secrecy he still commits his crimes.

The even more developed feels his egoism to be a loathsome thing indeed, until he cannot tolerate it within him and rejects it completely, as much as he detects of it, until he cannot enjoy the labour of others. Then begin to emerge in us the sparks of love for others, called altruism, which, in general is the good attribute.

And that too evolves in him gradually. First there develops in him the love and desire to bestow upon his family and next of kin, as the verse goes - "thou shall not ignore your own flesh". When he develops further, the attribute of bestowal expands in him to the people around him, which are his town's men or his nation. And so he adds, until he finally develops love for all humanity.

Conscious Development and Unconscious Development

Bear in mind, that two forces serve to push us up the rungs of the aforementioned ladder, until we reach its head in the sky, which is the purposeful point of the equality of our form with our Maker. And the difference between these two forces is that the first pushes us from behind, which we refer to as the Path of Pain, or the Way of the Earth.

From that path stems the philosophy of morality called Ethics, which is based on an experimental knowledge, through examination of the practical intelligence, the essence of which is but a summation of the visible damages that result from the nucleons of egoism.

These experiments come to us by chance, meaning not as a result of a conscious choice. Despite that they are certain to bring us to the aim, for the image of evil grows ever clearer in our mind, and to the extent that we recognize its damage, we distance ourselves from it and thus climb to a higher rung in the ladder.

The second force pushes us consciously, that is of our own choice. That force stands in front of us and pulls us forward, and that is what we determine as the Path of Torah

and Mitzvot. For observing Torah and mitzvot in order to bring contentment to our Maker, rapidly develops that sense of the recognition of evil, as we've shown in the Giving of the Torah. And here we benefit twice:

- A) We do not have to wait for the ordeals of life to push us from behind, since the strength of their push is measured only according to the measure of the agony and destruction. On the contrary, through the subtle gentleness that we feel when working sincerely to Him, to please Him, we learn to recognize the lowness of the sparks of self-love, as obstacles on our road to receiving that gentle taste of bestowal to the Lord.
- B) We save time. For He operates to 'enlighten' us, thus enabling us to increase our work and hasten time as we please.

Religion is Not for the Good of the People, But for the Good of the Worker

Many are mistaken and compare our holy Torah with Ethics. But that has come to them because they have never tasted religion in their lives. I call upon them: "Taste and see that the Lord is good". It is true that both ethics and religion aim at one thing – to raise man above the filth of the narrow self-love and bring him to the summit of the love for others.

But still they are distant one from the other as the distance between the thought of the Creator from the thought of man. For religion extends from the thoughts of the Creator and ethics comes from thoughts of flesh and blood and from the experiences of their lives. Therefore, the difference between them is obvious, both in practical aspects and in the final aim. For the recognition of good and evil that develops in us through ethics as we use it, is relative to the success of the society.

With religion, however, the recognition of good and evil that develops in us as we use it is relative to God alone. That is to say from a change of form from the Maker, to **equivalence** of form with Him, which is called adhesion.

And they are also completely distant from one another regarding the purpose. For the purpose of ethics is the well-being of society as far as far as examination of practical intelligence is concerned, which is taken from the events of life. But in the end, that purpose does not promise its follower any elation above the boundaries of nature, which is therefore still subject to criticism, for who can prove to an individual the extent of his benefit in such a way, that he will be compelled to belittle his own self, to a certain degree, in favour of the wellbeing of society?

The religious goal, however, promises the well-being of the individual who follows it. As we have already shown that when man is converted to loving others, he is in direct adhesion, which is equivalence of form with the Maker, and along with it man passes from his narrow world, full of pain and impediments, to an eternal world of bestowal to the Lord and to the people.

You will also find a significant difference regarding the support. Because following the ethics is supported by the favour of people, which is like a rent that finally pays off. And when man grows accustomed to this work, he cannot ascend in degrees of ethics, for he is now used to this work, that is well rewarded by society.

But by observing Torah and mitzvot in order to please his Maker, without any reward, he climbs the rungs of ethics, precisely to the extent that he pursues it, since there is no payment on his path. And each penny is added and they accumulate to a great

account. And finally he acquires a second nature, which is bestowal to others without any self-gratification, except for the bare necessities of his life.

Now he is found to really have been freed from the incarcerations of creation. For when one detests self-reception and his soul wants no more of the petite physical pleasures and respect, he finds himself roaming freely in the Lord's world. And he is certain that no damage and misfortune will ever occur, since all the damages come to a man through the self-reception that is imprinted in him.

Thus we have thoroughly shown that the purpose of religion is only for the individual who delves in it, and not at all for the use and benefit of common people, although all his actions revolve around the benefit of people and are measured by these acts. But that is but a passage to the sublime goal, which is equality with the Maker. And now we can comprehend that the purpose of religion is collected while living in this world. And examine closely in The Giving of the Torah, the matter of the purpose of the whole and the purpose of the individual.